



Australian Bureau of Statistics

1376.0 - Local Government and ABS (Newsletter), Dec 2003

Previous ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 17/12/2003

Local Government and ABS is a quarterly newsletter created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) aimed at helping the Local Government Sector use statistics to assist with planning and other community servicing decisions.

A specific aim of this newsletter is to help you easily find information on the ABS website. It explains the structure of the ABS website and provides direct electronic links to statistical series of use to local government. Electronic links are coloured and underlined and can be activated using the mouse button. Statistical terms are also explained to help make sense of more complex data.

Local Government and ABS provides a central contact point where you can provide your views and suggestions as to how the ABS can better assist local government.

We encourage you to forward this newsletter to others and post it on your bulletin board. Anyone is welcome to receive Local Government and ABS. To subscribe, just send an email to jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au with "subscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter please unsubscribe by sending an email to jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au with "unsubscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line.

In this issue:

- **Census counts**
- **What is ERP?**
- **Service Population Pilot Study**
- **Local government protecting and managing the environment - how much?**
- **The Australian Standard Geographical Classification and the role and definition of LGA regions**
- **Mesh Blocks, a new geographical building block for local government**
- **Regional Statistics Program**
- **What's happening in Local Government Finance**
- **Links to previous editions of Local Government and ABS**
- **Newsletter contact details**

Census counts

The **Census of Population and Housing**, which is conducted every five years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), seeks to accurately measure the number of people in Australia at a point in time and obtain details about their key characteristics and the dwellings in which they live. Key data items collected include place of usual residence, place of employment, method of travel to work, employment status, occupation and industry.

Since 1971 the Census has provided two population counts:

- The '**place of enumeration**' count is a count of all persons (including all visitors except foreign diplomats and their families) who spent Census Night in Australia, based on where they spent that night; and
- The '**place of usual residence**' count is a count of all persons, excluding overseas visitors, on the basis of where they usually live, rather than where they were on Census Night.

The ABS aims to select a census date which minimises the proportion of the population who are not at their usual place of residence. Nevertheless, place of enumeration counts will be affected in some areas by the inclusion of seasonal tourists, transient workers or other overnight visitors.

While the ABS asks people to report their usual residence as the residence in which they live, or intend to live, for six months or more of the census year, perceptions of usual residence may vary according to other factors. For example, 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workers employed at mine sites in the Goldfields on a 'two weeks on/one week off' basis would expect to spend approximately eight months of the year in the Goldfields region. However, many FIFO workers, who have a residence and family elsewhere in Australia, report this family base as their place of usual residence.

[Back to top](#)

What is ERP?

The Estimated Resident Population (ERP) is the official ABS estimate of the Australian population and is used as an important input to the allocation of government funds to local government. The ERP is based on usual residence counts of the Population Census and is compiled as at 30 June of each census year and then updated quarterly between censuses for the states and territories. These intercensal estimates of the resident population are subsequently revised each time a population census is taken.

In the compilation of the ERP for census years, three important adjustments are made to the census count based on Place of Usual Residence.

The first is an adjustment for census underenumeration. The level of underenumeration is derived from the Post Enumeration Survey (PES) which is conducted soon after the Census, and from estimates based on demographic analysis.

The second adjustment is the inclusion of an estimated number of Australian residents who are temporarily overseas on census night and are therefore not covered by the Australian Census. The number of such people is estimated from statistics on overseas arrivals and departures.

The third adjustment occurs because the Census does not fall on 30 June but in the first week in August. For example, population estimates at 7 August need to be back-dated to 30 June. This is accomplished using data from births and deaths registrations, overseas arrivals and departures data and estimates of interstate migration for the period 1 July to 7 August.

The ERP at census date is updated quarterly at the national and State levels by the use of demographic statistics (births, deaths, overseas and interstate migration). At the Statistical Local Area (SLA) level, reliable statistics on migration are not available and the **ERP at this level** is updated annually, taking into consideration indicators of population change. The ABS uses indicators such as numbers of dwelling approvals, drivers licences, Medicare enrolments and electricity connections.

Estimates by age and sex are produced annually at national, State and SLA and LGA level.

[Back to top](#)

Service Population Pilot Study

A Demography Working Paper entitled "**Service Population Pilot Study**" reports on the outcomes of a pilot study undertaken by the ABS, on behalf of the National Office of Local Government (NOLG), to investigate the feasibility of producing estimates for specified service populations.

The study was commissioned as a result of concerns expressed by a number of local government authorities across Australia that government funding based on estimates of resident populations (ERPs), as currently prepared by the ABS, does not take adequate account of tourists, fly-in/fly-out workers and other non-usual residents who use services provided by those authorities.

'Service population' is therefore used in this paper to refer to all persons who access services and facilities generally provided by the local government authority. Such persons may be permanent or temporary residents of the area from which the service is sought, or they may be daytime visitors (including commuters), overnight or short-term visitors to the area.

Although much information is currently held by State Government and other agencies which could assist in the measurement of service populations, the study was unable to identify any indicators which could be used successfully to estimate a total service population for all five authorities investigated. Some data sources were identified however which, subject to the acceptance of certain explicit assumptions by major stakeholders, could be used to produce estimates for a particular component of a total service population.

The study builds on work undertaken by ABS in 1996 and presented in **Demography Working Paper 96/4 - When ERPs Aren't Enough**

[Back to top](#)

Local government protecting and managing the environment - how much?

The Local Government Environment and Natural Resources Survey was developed in response to requests by local governments, local government associations and others for national information on local government financial transactions related to managing the environment and natural resources. These activities represent a significant amount of local government's budget. Such information is not available in a detailed form from Local Government Finance Statistics.

This is the fifth time the survey has been conducted and the estimates collected from 1997-98 until 2000-2001 demonstrate that local government is a significant player in managing the nation's environment and natural resources.

For example, in 2000-1, Australian local government spent a total of \$2.5 billion on measures to protect the environment and \$1.8 billion on natural resource management. This was an average of \$130 per person on environment protection and \$92 per person on natural resource management activities. **Main features** for the 2000-01 data are available at no charge on the ABS website and catalogue number **4611.0 Environment Expenditure, Local Government, Australia** can be viewed free at your **public libraries**. Contact your local library to find out how to best access this title.

With the development of the Local Government Purpose Classification (LGPC) by the ABS Local Government Statistic Unit (LGSU), it is expected that the Local Government Environment and Natural Resources Survey will undergo a major redesign next year.

In early October 2003, the Local Government Environment and Natural Resources Survey 2002-2003 was mailed to approximately 70% of local government authorities (not including Aboriginal regional councils). Unlike previous surveys, and as a way of reducing respondent burden, the 2002-2003 collection is also providing the public sector estimates for the **Waste Management Industry Survey**.

By the end of November, over 44% of the councils had returned completed survey forms and an additional 22% had registered their intention to complete and return the survey before Christmas. Thank you for your prompt attention to the survey request. This timely response will assist in the release of the data on schedule in mid 2004.

Whilst this response is encouraging, every council's response is important to produce accurate and meaningful information from this survey.

If your council is in the survey and you are having any difficulties or there are reasons why you cannot return the form straight away, please contact Alison Dargue at the ABS either by ringing the free-call number 1800 677 903 or email a.dargue@abs.gov.au.

[Back to top](#)

The Australian Standard Geographical Classification and the role and definition of LGA regions.

In the previous edition of this Newsletter, we introduced Local Government Areas (LGAs) and Collection Districts (CDs) as the two basic building blocks for the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), and described how they relate to Statistical Local Areas (SLAs). This article outlines the role and definition of the LGAs in the ASGC structures. Local Government Areas (LGAs) are the cornerstone of the ASGC with the LGA Structure maintaining a dynamic link to the "real world". In aggregate, LGAs cover the

incorporated part of Australia. All ASGC spatial units smaller than an LGA aggregate precisely to LGAs. This means that all data available at CD or Statistical Local Area (SLA) level is also available for LGAs. In addition there is data which is collected and disseminated specifically at the LGA level, eg Local Government Finance.

LGAs change over time; in their boundaries, names and/or status. The creation and delimitation of LGAs is the responsibility of the state and territory governments and all, except the Australian Capital Territory, have incorporated areas defined. The ABS monitors these changes and includes them in the new edition of the ASGC released each year; date of effect 1 July. Local government bodies are defined in such state and territory legislation as:

- Local Government Acts
- Indigenous Council Acts
- Specific Acts and regulations such as the Queensland **City of Brisbane ACT 1924 and the Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation Pty Limited Agreement (Weipa Town Area) Regulation 1994**

Considerable resources are expended in the ABS to track changes to official LGAs through the state and territory government gazettes.

In all states and the Northern Territory each incorporated area has defined official status and name. As a consequence, LGAs are described in the ASGC by their name followed by a suffix identifying a status type. There are various LGA status types used in the official names of local government areas which are reflected in the ASGC. In Victoria, for example, the following are used; City (C), Rural City (RC), Borough (B) and Shire (S). Examples are: the City of Albury becomes Albury (C) and the District Council of Copper Coast becomes Copper Coast (DC).

All LGAs listed in the ASGC LGA Structure are assigned their ASGC state/territory (S/T) single digit code plus a four digit code which ends in zero. Examples are:

S/T LGA

- 1 (NSW) 0110 Armidale Dumaresq (A) - NSW Local Government Area (excluding Cities)
- 2 (Vic) 2490 Golden Plains (S) - Shire
- 3 (QLD) 1000 Brisbane (C) - City

Users of the LGA Structure should be aware that codes may change between editions of the ASGC if complex changes to LGAs occur.

More detailed information describing LGA spatial units and their changes over time are included in the **Australian Standard Geographic Classification 2001** Catalogue No 1216.0.

[Back to top](#)

Mesh Blocks, a new geographical building block for local government

Across its statistical collections the ABS uses a common standard for geographical areas known as the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC). Local Government Area is a key spatial unit of the ASGC (see previous article in this issue). Within an LGA, the smallest building block of the ASGC is the Census Collection District (CD), typically comprising 100 to 220 households. CDs are commonly used by local governments for detailed spatial analysis of Census data at the local level. CDs are however subject to certain constraints and consequently they do not always coincide, in shape and size, with local areas of interest such as Wards, neighbourhoods and various catchment area boundaries. This in turn means that Census data can only be approximated for these areas.

The ABS proposes to overcome this shortcoming by developing a new micro-level geographical unit known as a Mesh Block. Mesh Blocks will contain a minimum of 20 to 50 households (about one fifth the size of a CD) and will be created to align with a wide range of administrative and natural boundaries. After the 2006 Census very basic census data will be available at the Mesh Block level, perhaps only number of dwellings and population counts, but the full range of census data will be available for combinations of Mesh Blocks to meet clients' individual needs.

Once designed and readily available, Mesh Blocks have the potential to become a new building block of local government geography so that a local government developing a set of regions for capacity planning, community development, service delivery or indeed any form of zoning, would build up its areas simply by adding Mesh Blocks together in whatever combination best suited its purpose. This in turn would ensure that census data could be accurately derived for those regions. For Mesh Blocks to fulfil their potential, however, it is vital that local governments inform the ABS on how to define Mesh Blocks in a way that would maximise their use not only for obvious statistical purposes but also as the building blocks for the other various zones and regions which are not defined for statistical purposes but for which statistical data are eventually needed.

A panel of experts is currently advising the ABS on ideal design parameters for Mesh Blocks and an ABS position paper will be published in March 2004, followed by an intensive consultation with state and local government and other key stakeholders from March to June 2004. The position paper will be published on the ABS web site and you will be informed of its release and the subsequent consultation process through this newsletter. We look forward to your input.

For further information contact Frank Blanchfield on 02 6252 7759 or email frank.blanchfield@abs.gov.au.
[Back to top](#)

Regional Statistics Program

The ABS Regional Statistics Program, as part of its brief to improve the breadth and quality of small area data available for policy assessment, decision makers and community use, has several key areas of work that will be of interest to local government.

The Program is developing an Information Development Plan (IDP) for Rural and Regional Statistics that will identify critical gaps in the availability of regional information and hence priorities for future statistical development. This has involved researching current demand for rural and regional statistics through government policy documents, public and private sector research papers, and academic literature.

Current demand for rural and regional data in Australia has primarily been driven by a small number of distinct social, economic and environmental policy/research themes; namely rural and regional quality of life, rural and regional economic growth, the sustainable management of rural and regional natural resources and the maintenance and development of community strength.

The IDP process involves the identification of existing rural and regional data sources. While census and survey information currently provide some of the data required by regional analysts, it is likely that in future, administrative data sources will play a key role in meeting data demand. Arising from this phase will be the identification of key rural and regional information gaps with the view to then seek consensus amongst data users about specific priorities for rural and regional statistical development. This will be a first step in the evolution of a detailed development plan for this field of statistics.

The June 2003 newsletter described the development of an on-line regional profile which will contain a suite of indicators available for small areas within Australia. Work on this project is continuing with a view to it being available on the ABS website in early 2004. The profile will initially provide data for a single year for standard Australian geographical regions. It is expected that the profile will include time series information in later versions.

The first version of the profile will contain indicators such as estimated resident population, births, deaths, unemployment rates, welfare recipient numbers, taxation data, buildings data, new motor vehicle sales and agricultural data. It is anticipated that, over time, this suite of indicators will grow.

In keeping with the main aims of the Regional Statistics Program to improve availability and access to small area data, particularly through the use of administrative data held by other government agencies, the RRSNC has focussed on utilising aggregated personal income tax data from the Australian Taxation Office.

The main focus to date has been on employment and earned income by producing a range of information about Wage & Salary Earners. A range of tables are currently available for each of the years 1995-96 to 2000-01 (the latest year being available on 19 December 2003).

Several information papers have been published to date. These include the Information Paper, "[Use of](#)

Individual Income Tax Data for Regional Statistics, Experimental Estimates for Small Areas, 1995-96 and 1996-97" (ABS Cat. no. 5673.0) which provided background details to this work and the subsequent follow-up, **"Experimental Estimates, Regional Wage and Salary Earner Statistics, Australia, 1995-96 to 1998-99" (also ABS Cat. no. 5673.0)** which provided some more up to date information.

Contact

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[Back to top](#)

What's happening in Local Government Finance

The state authority in each jurisdiction has now despatched the annual financial consolidated collection instrument to councils. The ABS Local Government Statistics Unit (LGSU) would like to again encourage those councils who have not yet completed them to do so by the respective due dates. This is particularly important as the release of the ABS' Government Finance Statistics publication (of which the ABS data on the forms is an important component) has been moved forward to be released prior to the Federal Budget. The LGSU will start processing relevant data on a progressive basis.

Members of the LGSU, in conjunction with the Queensland Grants Commission and Department of Local Government, recently held workshops in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Gladstone, Mackay and Cairns to assist councils in completing the form. Queensland was the focus at this point due to having the most significant changes made in the way data are collected in that state.

The LGSU will be arranging with other state authorities to hold similar workshops in coming months.

The LGSU has completed processing the September Quarterly Government Finance Estimates collection. This included a number of changes to the collection instrument based on feedback provided during recent visits to surveyed councils. For this year, there have also been a number of councils rotated in and out of the collection. Encouraging feedback to these changes was received and importantly, the burden placed on those councils responding has decreased overall.

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[Back to top](#)

Links to previous editions of Local Government and ABS

Local Government and ABS Edition 3 September 2003
Local Government and ABS Edition 2 June 2003
Local Government and ABS Edition 1 March 2003

Newsletter contact details

This newsletter is one way to help improve communication between the ABS and the Local Government Sector. New ABS initiatives to assist local government organisations will be announced in this newsletter as they evolve. We would like your views and suggestions about this newsletter so that it remains useful and assists you to understand and use ABS statistics. Please email comments to the Local Government Sector Account Manager, jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au or telephone (08) 82377621

[Back to top](#)

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